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THE SPANISH INQUIRY

SOME ACCOUNTS

OF THE

A RETURN TO LONDON FROM SPAIN.

LETTER.

TO

SIR WILLIAM PULTENEY, BART.

EDITED BY

JOHN MURRAY,

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

Lately published,

SOME ACCOUNT

OF THE

SHREWSBURY HOUSE OF INDUSTRY,
&c. &c.

FOURTH EDITION.

Preparing for the Pres,

A SERIES OF LETTERS

ON THE

STUDY OF NATURE.



A
LETTER
TO
SIR WILLIAM PULTENEY, BART.

*Representative in Parliament for
THE BOROUGH OF SHREWSBURY,*

CONTAINING
Some Observations
ON THE BILL

FOR
The better Support and Maintenance
OF
THE POOR,
PRESENTED TO
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
BY THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM Pitt,

BY I. WOOD,
Author of Some Account of the Shrewsbury House of Industry.

Shrewsbury :

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1797.

Shrewsbury House of Industry, 23d Jan. 1797.

AT A GENERAL BOARD,

The Rev. H. C. ADAMS, in the Chair :

Mr. Wood having communicated his Letter, addressed to Sir William Pulteney, Bart. on the subject of the Bill for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor :

Resolved unanimously,

That he be requested to publish the same.



A LETTER, &c.

SIR,

AS a Representative for this Borough in Parliament, I take the liberty of addressing to you some Considerations on a measure in which your Constituents, as well as the Public at large, are highly interested. And it is with particular satisfaction that I lay them before a Man, who so diligently attends to, and so honestly and faithfully executes, his duty in the British Senate.

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You

You, Sir, will, I am well persuaded, give them a candid and impartial examination; and decide on the important question to which they advert, with sound, unbiased judgment, and enlightened discretion. It would ill become me unnecessarily to take up any of your valuable time; I shall, therefore, without further introduction, proceed to those Observations on the "Bill for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor," which have occurred to me on this most weighty subject.

The outline of this Bill is evidently taken from two excellent Institutions for the Employment of the Poor, established on the Continent; the one at Munich, under the direction of Count RUMFORD, the other at Hamburgh, of which an admirable account has been published by the worthy M. VOCHT. But the situation of the Poor in those Cities is very different from their situation in this Kingdom; the active government of those establishments is placed in very different hands; and they

they are much better attended to, than can possibly be expected under the regulations of the present bill. If, indeed, a RUMFORD, or a VOCHT could be found, to execute the office of "Manager of the Poor," in every District School of Industry to be established throughout the whole Kingdom, much fewer objections would lie against the present measure.

The great grievance under which the public groans, and cries aloud for redress, is, the very heavy, and continually increasing burden, of the Parochial Taxes; and the misapplication, or, to speak more correctly, the *ill* application, of a great part of the money annually expended in the support of the Poor. The former evil is the consequence of the latter; and will undoubtedly continue, until some effectual remedy is provided.

It is equally true, that this remedy must consist in the adoption of some plan for introducing INDUSTRY AMONG THE POOR, and compelling all that are able, to earn

their own support. But it is as true, that so long as the management of the Poor is vested in *Annual Officers*, whether they be denominated Overseers, Managers, or Wardens of the Poor; every attempt to effect this important reform must inevitably fail of success. Their own occupations, as I have elsewhere observed,* afford them not sufficient leisure for that regular attendance and attention, which this would require; and, by the time they become a little accustomed to the duties of their office, and acquainted with the poor placed under their management, their term of service expires, and fresh men succeed them, who labour under the same disadvantages.

In the present Bill, indeed, " Members of Parliament, Privey Counsellors, Commissioners of the Land Tax, &c. &c." are appointed " Visitors of the Poor."† But

* See printed Account of the Shrewsbury House of Industry, 4th edit.

† The eleventh Clause of the Bill—p. 6, of the folio copy printed by order of the House of Commons, to which all the subsequent references are made.

But the office is not compulsory upon any of the persons described; * and, however zealous a few individuals may be at the outset, when they come to experience the difficulties, embarrassments, and innumerable disagreeable circumstances, that will infallibly attend the execution of the present plan; they will very soon become disgusted with the rubs and obstacles that will perpetually occur, grow weary of the employment they have accepted; and either neglect its duties, or resign their office. Nor is it indeed required from these "Visitors" that they should take up the labouring oar: they are only when they think proper to *visit* the Schools of Industry, and "alter, regulate, and appoint, the rate of wages and allowances." † And it may often happen, when these Visitors

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* " Provided always, That the said persons so from time to time to be appointed Visitors by the said Justices, and *assenting unto such appointment.*"—Eleventh Clause, p. 6.

† Twenty-fifth Clause, p. 133.

are speculative, theoretical men, inexperienced in the practical part of the business to be carried on in these Schools, that their visitation, superintendance, and controul, may — in the words of a celebrated Dignitary of the Church — render “ confusion worse confounded.”

* The men, then, upon whom the execution of this vast plan must principally and ultimately rest, are the “ Wardens of the Poor;”* and such of them more particularly, as are appointed to have the care of the Schools, under the denomination of “ The Managers of the Schools of Industry.”†

Let us now stop for a moment, to consider upon whom this mighty burden is imposed? — Upon Wardens, or persons chosen out of the Annual Overseers.‡ — Upon

* Fifteenth Clause, p. 8. † Ibid, p. 9.

‡ “ There shall be appointed for every Parish united by virtue of this Act, one Person to be Warden of

men who, in general, have their own employments, and the maintenance of their own families to attend to.—Upon men, the great majority of whom cannot be supposed capable of conducting a manufactory.—And, upon men who, when they enter upon office, are strangers to the poor committed to their care, as well as to every part of that business they are required to execute; and, before they can acquire much practical experience, go out of office again, and are succeeded by others precisely in the same predicament.*

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of the Poor; and one of those Persons shall be appointed to the care and management of the School or Schools of Industry, and of the Poor receiving employment, &c. and for every Parish not united, there shall also be appointed one Warden, or where no Warden appointed, then the Overseers shall execute the Office.”
Clause Fifteen, p. 8.

* Fifteenth Clause.—The wording of this clause is obscure; but if it is intended that a Manager *once* chosen shall *continue* in office, or be as it were a perpetual overseer, the appointment, with all the business attached to it by this Bill, and the loose inspection to which it is subjected, is still more exceptionable.

It is very material also further to consider, what these “ Managers,” thus circumstanced, are to undertake? — They are “ from time to time, to provide a proper stock of hemp, flax, silk, thread, cotton, wool, iron, leather, or other materials; and also prepare tools and implements for the employment of the poor.”* If they neglect to do this, for the short space of “ ten days,” after receiving an order for that purpose from “ two Justices of the Peace,” those Justices may “ compel them to provide such materials *at their own expense*; and, in default of payment, levy the same, with costs, by distress.”†

This clause, when applied to men so circumstanced, is surely highly arbitrary and severe. I mean not to give offence, and I am willing to believe that the Minister, in the multitude of his important avocations, had not leisure to consider the nature of this very penal provision. The natural consequences
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* Seventeenth Clause, p. 9. † Eighteenth Clause, p. 10.

of such a regulation, thus rigidly enforced, will be, that "The Manager," to avoid the penalty, will immediately procure — perhaps at the worst hand, (for the time may not allow him to apply to the best) — any quantity of materials these two Justices of the peace may think proper to order. It *may*, *possibly*, turn out, that the kind of employment these raw materials are calculated for, is not eligible, or cannot be adopted with advantage, in that particular District or School. May I not go farther, and venture to pronounce, that the hasty execution of these hasty orders from "Justices of the Peace," who cannot be supposed to be best versed in manufacturing concerns, *will* very often be productive of much unnecessary expense?

But this is by no means the whole of the task imposed upon the Manager: he is not only to attend to the employment of the Poor in the School of Industry, but he is to furnish them with employment at their

own dwellings: * he is, with the approbation of a Justice, to grant what further relief may be necessary to any of the poor within his district: † he is to take care that no poor person refuse to permit his children, above five years old, to be sent to the School of Industry: ‡ he is to settle the rate of wages each such child is to be allowed: § he is to settle terms with Overseers of the Highways, &c. for the hire of the poor: || and he is to contract for the necessary land and buildings. ** This, and a great deal more, is the employment allotted to this Manager.

Is it possible, Sir, that a duty so complicated, and so important, can be executed in a proper, effectual, and beneficial manner, by such a Manager; under all the disadvantages of inexperience, attention to his own family, and private concerns? The frauds and mismanagement of Over-

* Clause 17, p. 9. † Clause 19, p. 10.

‡ Clause 20, p. 11. § Ibid. || Clause 24, p. 13.

** Clauses 33, 34, p. 19.

seers is the subject of general complaint; but, instead of providing a remedy, the door is here set still wider open, for the admission of every species of abuse; and the artful manager will laugh in his sleeve at all the visitations of Privy Counsellors, Commissioners, &c. he will easily find out methods to elude all their vigilance; nay, by misrepresentations, not easily detected, to obtain a sanction to his misconduct, in their *probatum est.*

But, admitting all the Managers to be honest, worthy, disinterested men; and supposing that all their successors, in all future years, will be of the same description, still I maintain, that it is not in the nature of things, that an attempt to establish manufactoryes for the employment of the poor, should ever succeed, when committed to the management of a succession of men so circumstanced; allowing them all the benefit of the adventitious aid provided by the present Bill. It is equally impossible, that the execution of such a plan should ever

contribute "gradually to reduce the excessive amount of the poor rates." *

Neither is this end likely to be obtained, by the additional allowances, &c. proposed to be granted to the poor, by the present Bill. Humanity, at the first glance, is indeed delighted with these indulgences; but, upon a moment's reflection, numerous circumstances present themselves, to dissipate the gay delusion. If these allowances, as is intended, become general; and, at the same time, the other provisions of the Bill are carried into effect; it requires not the sagacity of a Newton, the penetration of a Locke, nor the inspiration of a Prophet, to pronounce with the utmost certainty, and from the fullest conviction, that the poor rates — heavy as they are at present — will be nearly, if not altogether doubled. A very serious consideration! For to an exceedingly numerous and valuable class of our fellow subjects, who now groan under the grievous

* Preamble to the Bill.

grievous burden, it would *then* become altogether insupportable.

If all poor persons having more than two children, are to have a right to demand these weekly allowances: that abuse of the parochial aid, now so prevalent, so loudly, and so justly complained of, will be increased in a ten-fold ratio. Persons who are poor, only because they are debauched, dissolute, and extravagant, will claim these allowances; and it will increase their indolence and debauchery, without benefitting their families. There are thousands of mechanics, and manufacturers, at Birmingham, Manchester, &c. &c. who can earn from one to two or three guineas a week: but (without this additional encouragement to their indolence and extravagance) they are already too generally disposed to neglect their work, as soon as they have earned what they deem sufficient for their weekly expenditure; the remainder of the week is spent in idleness and dissipation. Their families, in the mean time, are barely supplied

plied with absolute necessities; and in this deplorable train, matters go on from generation to generation, not only without amendment, but with increasing depravity and wretchedness.

I have here, Sir, a fact to state from authentic documents,* that must impress every thinking mind, with feelings I am unable to describe.

In the year 1787, the expenditure at Birmingham, for the support of the poor, was Eleven Thousand One Hundred and Thirty Two Pounds Sixteen Shillings and Ninepence Halfpenny. Considerable as this must be deemed, there has been a progressive increase; and, the last year, it ~~was~~ advanced to Twenty Four Thousand and ~~—~~ Fifty Pounds Fourteen Shillings and Three Halfpence. The total amount of this expenditure in ten successive years, for the town of Birmingham only, came to

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* A printed account published by the Overseers.

ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY TWO THOUSAND
 FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY ONE POUNDS
 THREE SHILLINGS AND TWOPENCE: and
 in this short space, the *annual* expenditure
 was more than doubled.

It is time, it will be said, to attempt some reform.—True.—But is it a time, by increasing the allowances to these people, *again* to double the parochial tax?—Is it a time to erect buildings, create salaries, and incur all the expense of providing materials, in order to attempt so doubtful, so hazardous an experiment, as that of carrying on a manufactory under the *actual* direction of individual managers?—The Birmingham Overseers will tell you, that the attempt has been made again and again, with every *real* advantage that can be derived from the provisions of the present Bill; but—it has never succeeded: In truth, Sir, the times are too serious, too critical, and too gloomy, to hazard so very *doubtful* an experiment at best, at the risk of exciting general discontent. There

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are many thousands of honest, industrious, families in this kingdom, who are greatly distressed, and can barely make a shift to struggle with their present difficulties. A very small addition to their burdens will cause the cup of misery to overflow, and plunge them into a state of wretchedness, that may prove hazardous to the public peace.

Another provision in this Bill must have been suggested to the Minister, by some gentleman, who would delight to indulge his own crude speculations, however mischievous the consequences that would result therefrom. If this gentleman should be invested with the power given to Justices and Visitors, I should like much to see the accounts of his district, a year or two hence. The proposition I allude to is plausible; and it is no wonder the right honourable gentleman's humanity should hastily catch at an idea, that presented itself to him in so fascinating a garb.—Any poor

poor person, who thinks he shall be enabled thereby to maintain his family, without further parochial relief, may have a sum of money advanced to him for the purchase of a Cow, or other animal yielding profit.*

Now, Sir, if only twenty poor persons in a whole parish obtain this assistance, upwards of Two Hundred Pounds will be thus expended in the first instance. If a hundred poor persons (which in many parishes would be a very moderate computation) are thus relieved, more than a Thousand Pounds must be immediately advanced, for the parochial expenditure in this one article only. Every cottager will think he has a peculiar claim to this indulgence; and, if inclosures continue, where will there be found pasture enough for all these animals? If such sums were to be advanced, to poor persons having four children for instance, out of their weekly allowance,

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* Third Clause, p. 2.

it would be between two and three years before the account would be balanced; and suppose in the mean time any particular distress should take place in such families, either all relief must be refused, on account of the large sum they stand indebted to the parish, or the parochial expenditure, where many such instances occur, (which will certainly be the case) must be enormously augmented.

Further; the Cow thus purchased by a poor person, may die, or become useless; is then a second sum of money to be advanced for the purchase of another? and are parishes to be saddled with this immense additional disbursement *ad infinitum*? It would be a curious speculation, what proportion of the cows thus given to the poor, would remain in their possession three months afterwards? If the subject were not too serious, I would wager, not one in twenty. Besides, either this aid must be given to all poor persons in the same pre-

predicament, or there must be partial and unjust preferences; and, what a wide field does all this open for fraud and abuse?

There is yet another very weighty objection to the present plan. And that is, the immense expense that must be inevitably incurred, before the wheels of this cumbrous machine can be set in motion. The kingdom is to be divided into districts; * land is to be purchased; † warehouses, workhouses for preparing the raw materials, and Schools of Industry, are to be erected in every district; ‡ furniture, machines, working tools, hemp, flax, silk, thread, cotton, wool, iron, leather, &c. are to be provided; § salaries to be paid to the warehouse-keepers, and wages to "proper and skilful workmen and servants, for preparing these materials, in order to their being put into the hands of the poor, for the purpose of

* Tenth Clause, p. 8. † Twenty-ninth Clause, p. 16.

‡ Fourteenth Clause, p. 8. § Twenty-sixth Clause, p. 14. and Seventeenth Clause, p. 9.

being manufactured." If the woollen manufactory is attempted; fulling mills must be erected. These, with the tenters, looms, jennies, warping mills, carding machines, &c. &c. will cost an immense sum for each District House: and, without the smallest inclination to exaggerate, I am convinced, that whatever manufacture is attempted, these preparatory expenses, including the raw materials, buildings, &c. will require, for the nation at large, an immediate advance of several millions.

If I have succeeded in my attempt to prove, that after all, the probability of success from this plan for establishing parochial manufactories is less than doubtful; it follows, as an undeniable consequence, that the present scheme ought *never* to be adopted. But more particularly objectionable must the attempt be at the present period; for, its failure must inevitably produce consequences, that every friend to his Country, and, I will add, every man of

of Humanity too, cannot contemplate, even in idea, without horror and dismay.

There are sundry enacting clauses in the Bill, by which HOUSES OF INDUSTRY, established by special Acts of Parliament, are rendered subject to all its provisions.*

I hope,

* Clauses 49, 52, 53, 54, 56, p. 24, 25, 26.—The following are extracts from these Clauses:

" It shall be lawful for the person or persons appointed to the management of the poor, or of any House of Industry, &c. incorporated by any Act or Acts of Parliament, by whatsoever name or names such persons shall be distinguished, to establish a School or Schools of Industry under this Act, *and to pursue the regulations herein contained for the management of the poor therein.*"

" No town, &c. incorporated by any Act or Acts of Parliament, nor any parish or parishes where any House of Industry, Workhouse, or other House, for the keeping, maintaining, or employing the poor, shall have been established under the authority of any Act of Parliament specially passed for the purpose, shall be required to build, purchase, or hire, any School or Schools

I hope, Sir, I shall be able to make it appear, that the enforcement of these clauses, would not only be highly unjust, but equally impolitic. There are now in this kingdom many establishments of this kind, and the parishes by whom they have been adopted, have expended, some of them six, some of them ten thousand pounds, and others still larger sums, upon the faith of Parliament, pledged to them in those special Acts. I contend that the regulations they have adopted,

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Schools of Industry, in any case where a school for the instruction and employment of the poor shall form a part of such Establishment. *Provided*, that from and after the passing of this Act, no Contract or Agreement for the Maintenance or Support of the Poor, or for taking the benefit of the work, labour, or service of the poor kept therein, shall be made or executed, or shall be valid or effectual. *Provided also*, that every House of Industry, &c. shall within any District or Districts of a County, for which Visitors are appointed, be subject to Visitation and SUPERINTENDANCE, in all matters and things in which any jurisdiction is hereby given to any person or persons whatever, as fully and effectually as if such House of Industry, &c. had been established under this act."

are far better calculated to produce the effect of introducing Industry among the Poor, and thereby "gradually reducing the excessive amount of the poor rates." And I contend further, that experience has in many instances demonstrated the expediency, practicability, and advantage, of the different plan they have adopted. The poor rates have *actually* been reduced; habits of industry, sobriety, and good morals, *have* been introduced among the poor; and the pleasing prospect opened thereby, is continually expanding.

I speak on this subject from my own observation and experience. I am now, for the second time, in the Direction of one of these Establishments. I have seen children, trained up in this seminary, become useful members of the community, happy in themselves, and no longer burdensome to the public. I could, at this hour, entertain Mr. PITT with the pleasing spectacle of Two Hundred Children and Youth,
well

well fed, clothed, and taught; the young ones attending the schools established in the House; those of five years old and upwards, busy at the wheel, the jenny, and the loom: all of them early inured to habits of cleanliness, decency, and virtue, and happily preserved from the misery and contagion of vice: I know that if this establishment had not taken place, these very children would have been strolling and begging in our streets, covered with filth and rags, without education or instruction, unless it were instruction in the arts of pilfering, and education in the habits of debauchery. I could shew him the prostitute, snatched from the paths of infamy, and rescued from the fangs of disease, labouring diligently for her support. He might visit our various departments, and see the healthy all usefully employed; the sick, the aged, and the infirm, carefully attended to by nurses appointed for the purpose, and provided with every necessary comfort and accommodation.

I have

I have had the pleasure of laying before many benevolent enquirers and distinguished characters, the whole detail of our management. It has been submitted to the strict scrutiny of men, not more eminent for their discernment, than distinguished for their exalted philanthropy. I have been gratified by their warm approbation, and endeavoured to profit by their suggestions. Above all, I have been supremely delighted to behold, as they contemplated our various classes, and particularly our little labourers, the tear of generous sensibility trickling down their cheeks, and their animated countenances strongly marked with the noblest emotions that can take place in the human heart.

And now, Sir, let me be permitted to ask, Are such Establishments, after all the expense that has been incurred, after all the good that has been produced, when the greatest difficulties have been surmounted, and the fairest prospects were opening

before them, to be at one stroke over-turned, in order to make way for so hazardous an experiment? Is the conduct of these establishments, and of that em-ployment for the poor which constitutes their most striking feature, to be subjected to the arbitrary mandates of two Justices of the Peace, or the superintendance and controul of visiting Privy Counsellors, Commissioners of the Land Tax, &c. &c? — It will perhaps be replied, No. The Bill only converts *Houses* of Industry into *Schools* of Industry; and under the latter denomi-nation they may be continued. But *how* are they to be continued? That mode of culture under which they have flourished, and borne such precious fruit, is to be wholly set aside; and another to be adopt-ed, that in one year—I had almost said, one short month—will compleatly undo, with respect to their present occupiers, all that has been effected. Can it require any laboured argument to prove, that the con-duct of such Establishments, vested in a permanent

permanent Board of Directors,* is in much better hands than the *Schools* of Industry will be, each under the care of a Manager? The qualification of the Directors renders them respectable: their number secures proper deliberation, and enables them to act with the advantage of combined judgment; and their duty, in consequence of the regulations that have been established, is neither burdensome nor disgusting.

In the *Schools* of Industry, to be erected under the authority of the present Bill, no provision is made for the reception, accommodation, and support of the aged, the infirm, those natural children that are thrown upon the parish from their birth, nor of those who from the

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death

* The Board is thus constituted: There are twelve Directors; they act for three years, and four go out by rotation every year; so that two thirds of the Body are always experienced in the Duties of their Office. I term it therefore a *permanent* Board. They are subject to a penalty for non-attendance at the Weekly Boards.

death of their parents, or other circumstances, it is necessary the parish should altogether provide for. In the *Houses* of Industry, all these circumstances have been duly attended to.

I am well aware of an objection that has been made upon this ground to Houses of Industry. I know that it has made a serious impression upon many humane and benevolent minds, and produced strong prejudices against these Establishments. It has been said, that the Directors of Houses of Industry, under the authority vested in them by the special Acts of Parliament they have obtained, are empowered to refuse relief to those poor who will not quit their own dwellings, and come to reside altogether in these Houses: And that it is extremely cruel, thus to deprive them of all the comforts, enjoyments, and pleasures of domestic life.

Sir,

Sir, I embrace with all my Soul the conclusion here stated; but I deny the *premises* from which it is deduced. The Magistrate has still a power to order relief to the poor in their own houses; the Directors—I speak for those at the Shrewsbury House in particular, (and I have no reason to believe that the case is different in others)—have always been in the habit and practice of granting this relief. We have indeed endeavoured to guard to the utmost of our power against those frauds and impositions, which have very much swelled the parochial expenditure for the support of the poor; but, Sir, the natural operation of the regulations we have established, and the powerful check given to fraud and imposition, has put it in our power to furnish *more liberal relief* to the poor in their own dwellings, in cases of real necessity and distress; and we have *actually* granted them this relief. We have at this very time upon our books, paupers disabled by accidents, or whose

whose families are visited with sickness, that receive a much larger weekly allowance than could or would have been afforded to them, before this establishment took place.*

We consider the House of Industry as a receptacle, or *stated* abode, only for the infirm who are altogether disabled, those children before mentioned, and those also for whom their parents are unable to provide. These latter are taken into the House, where they are clothed, fed, and taught. Their parents visit them, and they visit their parents. When they are put out apprentices, the parents are always

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* The 11th Bye-Law of the Shrewsbury House states, That no *weekly* pay be allowed to the Out-poor, except in the cases there mentioned. The word *weekly* is printed in italics, to express the real object of this regulation; which was to distinguish *weekly* from *occasional* relief. The Bye-Law has been since amended; and does not (as indeed it never did) preclude weekly allowances or pay, so long as the parties are deemed proper objects for it.

consulted; and when *they* object to the party, no contract takes place. Their abode in the House, therefore, is no greater a separation than takes place when children are sent to reside at school. Happy, indeed, is the separation, for the children of profligate parents. It is likewise an *occasional* residence for those poor single persons who cannot procure employ, or who are under a temporary disability, from sickness or otherwise, to earn their own support. To all these, it is a most comfortable asylum, and they are all at liberty to depart, with all their property, when they find themselves in a situation to provide for their own maintenance.

It might be deemed invidious to enter more at large into a comparison of the two Plans; that already adopted by *Houses* of Industry, and that now proposed for the establishment of *Schools*. Let the candid and impartial, dismissing all unjust prejudice and prepossession, determine whether

ther of the two is the best calculated to guard against fraud, abuse, and extravagant expenditure; to introduce with the least difficulty, that reform and industry among the poor, which is the leading and important object of both; and to effect a reduction of the poor rates.

But, however opinions may differ in this respect, it is with confidence expected from the wisdom, and from the honour of Parliament, that if the present Bill, notwithstanding all the serious objections which have been stated thereto, must pass into a law, established Houses of Industry may at least be exempted from its operation: and that both experiments may be fairly tried, until experience shall with certainty decide, which is most practicable and expedient.

Perhaps it will be said, that it is high time some effort should be made to introduce Industry among the Poor, and promote their Reform: that plausible objections

plausible objections may be advanced against every proposition that could be brought forward for that purpose; and that it is impossible to engage in the attempt without encountering some difficulties, and risking some expense.

But, Sir, in the present state of things, will it not be wise, as far as possible, to *diminish* those difficulties, and that risk? — Were a general Bill passed, empowering parishes, whenever they shall think it expedient, to incorporate themselves for the purpose of establishing Houses of Industry, under the government and management of what I have called permanent Boards, vesting in those Boards the necessary powers, under such *well-considered* restrictions as the wisdom of Parliament shall think meet, (but not under the superintendance and controul of Justices or Privy Counsellors) and guarding at the same time, by positive restrictions, against any abuse of that power to the oppression of the poor; it is hum-

bly conceived that all will be done by the Legislature, that they can to any good purpose attempt.*

Sir, the terrible idea that such Boards would abuse their power, is a phantom that has been conjured up by men of heated imaginations, and exists nowhere but in their disturbed and busy fancies. Is it probable that twelve or twenty men of the respectable qualifications required, should combine to oppress the Poor? Is not power as safely at least lodged in their hands, as in the hands of any one or two Magistrates, or of any "Manager of a School of Industry?" and may not a wise and equitable outline be drawn for their guidance and direction?

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* The general Act of 23d Geo. III. contains clauses respecting a general assessment for parishes so united, and the *annual* election and office of guardian, &c. that render it useless for the purpose intended.

Were some such proposition as the above adopted, parishes would then, as they found the burden of parochial taxes becoming intolerable, *voluntarily* adopt that mode of introducing employment for the poor, which, from their knowledge of local circumstances, they found to be the most eligible. They would then engage in the attempt with a hearty good will; and this most desirable alteration in the state and government of the poor, would *gradually* take place. It is such free and voluntary exertions, and such a mode of proceeding only, that can furnish the least chance of success.

I have thus, Sir, freely, but I hope with proper decency and respect, taken the liberty to lay before you and the public, those observations that have occurred to me, after serious attention to this very important subject. I neither wish, nor expect, that they should receive any further consideration or regard, than they may derive

derive from their intrinsic weight in the scale of sound reason and impartial judgment. I have no private views to serve; no favours to solicit; no party interest to promote. Content with the humble discharge of my duty as a member of society, I shall at all events enjoy the satisfaction, of having sincerely and honestly endeavoured to promote its welfare.

With much respectful consideration, I have the honour to subscribe myself,

SIR,

Your most obedient

humble Servant,

Shrewsbury,
23d January, 1797.

J. WOOD.

